

REPORT ON RURAL ECONOMIC SURVEY IN UNITED KHASI-JAINTIA HILLS.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1 Objective.—Consequent upon restrictions on trade emerging in the border markets after partition, the economic condition of the people living in the border areas of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills district adjoining East Pakistan, suffered a serious set back. There was demand from the people all over the border areas for adequate relief as well as rehabilitation of their shattered economy. From time to time Government took up various relief measures but, for adopting a planned programme of relief and rehabilitation in an integrated and sustained manner, the need for a comprehensive economic survey of the district with special emphasis on the border areas, came to the forefront. Accordingly at the instance of Government of Assam, the Department of Economics and Statistics addressed itself to the task of launching an economic survey in the district. 43 648 65

The programme consisted of an intensive study of the conditions in selected villages and was designed to meet the following objectives:—
(I) To obtain a broad picture of the rural economic conditions in the district and in particular, to provide factual data on the various aspects of agriculture and farm economics, e. g., land tenure, size and distribution of agricultural holdings and farms, fragmentation, income and expenditures occupation and the like. Data should be collected also on the occupations and industries which play subsidiary roles in the economy of the district. (II) Special emphasis need be given on border areas, in order to bring to light the measure of suffering of the border people as a result of partition and to suggest various long and short term measures for ameliorating the condition of the border people. (III) The survey should adequately cover the Community Development areas also in order that it becomes possible to make an assessment of the impact of the community development programmes on the socio-economic life of the people in these areas. 12 654

1.2 Coverage and Period.—The field work of the survey was started on 20th February, 1958 and was completed by the middle of July, 1958 thus requiring nearly four and a half months.

1.3 Design of the Survey.—For a study of border economy a purposive selection of ten villages in the border area, which were known to be important from the point of view of production and distributive trade in pre-partition days was made. Similarly for Project areas a total of eight villages two from each of the four blocks in the district—where intensive development programmes were taken up, were selected. These villages were selected by the Project Officers themselves. Apart from these, a random sample of ten villages from all over the district were taken. Thus a total of 28 villages all over district—10 from border areas, 8 from project areas and 10 from general areas were selected for

12 investigation. The sample size of ten villages only out of a total 1802 villages in the general areas of the district is indeed, very small, which nevertheless had to be restricted to commensurate with the availability of time and field staff at our disposal and in consideration of the difficulty of conducting field work in the remote interiors of a hill district, where communication facilities lack so badly.

1.4 Plan of Investigation.—Plan of investigation may be considered as consisting of two parts viz.—

(1) The general investigation was confined mainly to the border areas. This consisted in holding meeting of villagers in the selected villages, discussing the various important problems facing them and recording their suggestions for improving their lot. Apart from meeting the villagers, problems were also discussed with the important people of the locality.

Schedules—Schedule I.—This schedule was meant for collection of village statistics relating to various facilities offered by the village, namely—communication, health, sanitation, education, marketing, cottage industries and the like.

Schedule I.—This was the most important schedule for collection of information on the economic aspect of the families. This was canvassed in all the families of the selected villages. The most important item on which informations were collected through this schedule were :—

Block V: Demographic particulars of household, occupational and employment pattern.

Block VI: Household indebtedness.

Block VII: Land-holding and farm.

Block VIII & IX: Implements and Livestock.

Block X & XI: Household expenditure.

Block XII: Receipts and disbursement of the household.

Schedule III.—Listing of household and occupation.

Special Schedule.—This was canvassed in all the households of the villages selected from Community Project areas. This was intended to collect information on adoption by households of various improved agricultural practices advocated through the Community Development programme and for assessment of the extent of public participation and co-operation in developmental works. Information was also collected on agricultural assistance received by households.

S

1.5 Method of collection of data and field organisation.—For the collection of data personal interview method was adopted. Actual investigation in the villages was done by Inspectors and Primary Investigators of the Department of Economics and Statistics. The District Statistical Officer was put directly in-charge of the investigation. He maintained general supervision, direction and control of their day-to-day work. The officers from headquarters also exercised overall supervision and inspection. Before starting the actual field work, the Director of Statistics, apart from personally visiting the border areas and selecting the villages for investigation in consultation with knowledgeable people of the locality, addressed letters to the District Council for rendering all necessary help who in turn instructed all the Members of the District Council and village Sirdars to extend their co-operation to the field staff. We take the opportunity of recording here our deep appreciation of the valuable help we received from various officials and non-officials in the conduct of the survey. 12/654 •

It is obvious that the success of such a survey under specially difficult situations faced in the inaccessible and backward hilly areas, entirely depends on the intellectual honesty and technical efficiency of the field staff as well as on their ability to call up the required extent of co-operation from all concerned. Though we could reasonably claim a high standard as regards the former category of requirement, the latter nevertheless presented itself as a tremendously difficult task as, the villagers—almost free from any tax or other obligation to the government—could not but receive this work with feelings of suspicion and scanned in it a device to levy some taxes or other by the government, in as much as it did involve some questions relating to land, income and expenditure, etc. It cost us a large measure of effort to keep the fiend of suspicion at bay. We had to hold meetings in each village and devote considerable time to convince the people that this was in no way connected with any taxation measure.

1.6 Interim Report.—In view of the urgency of the border problem, particularly the setting up of Border Rehabilitation Committee for suggesting ways and means for rehabilitation of the border economy, we hastened to submit an interim report on border economy to the committee on the basis of investigation completed only in five border villages in April, 1958.

243 on from October to December. For millets the seed is sown in April-May and reaped about six months later. Maize is usually sown in April-May and ripens in August-September. For potato, generally 244 three crops are raised in the district; the first is sown in December-January and harvested in April-May, the second is sown in February-March and is gathered in June-July and the third is sown in July-August and is harvested in November-December.

245 For oranges and betelnut the orchards are cleared of weeds twice a year. Harvesting of orange takes place from October to January. Betelnut ripens at the beginning of the year and are collected between February and May.

241 2.6.3 Agricultural implements.—The usual agricultural implements are a hoe, a sickle, three or four kinds of doas, a harrow, a crowbar which is used for the construction of irrigation channels, 'sierras' and winnowing baskets. Bullock drawn plough is used in wet paddy cultivation in parts of Jowai subdivision and in Bhoi area and resembles the one in use in the plains of the State.

2.6.4. General cultural practices.—The cultivators mostly adhere to their indigenous practices of cultivation. Rotation of crops is not widely used. Cultivation of rice is usually done by broadcasting the seeds though transplanting is also in vogue in some areas. Mixed cropping is widely practised. Cultivation by making terraces in the hill slopes is gaining popularity in the district.

433 2.7 Cottage Industries.—Cottage Industries, it appears, have not 326 found very great favour among the people of the district. A few 323 families here and there manufacture iron implements, earthenware, 285 pottery, baskets, mats and jewellery. In striking contrast with other 306 districts weaving of cotton clothes is rare among the Khasis. The 286 Mikirs in Bhoi area and in areas adjoining North Cachar and Mikir Hills practice it only for their domestic consumption. At present, the 171 Government is trying to popularise weaving in the district and this 654 has been welcomed by the Khasis. Among other cottage industries 231 production of eri cocoon in the northern part of the district adjoining Kamrup district and bee keeping throughout the district are worth mentioning.

142 2.8 The People.—The Khasis and Jaintias are a short sturdy 147 race distinct from the neighbouring hill tribes. By nature they are 441 hardy and laborious and in respect of manual labour, they are free 563 from any inhibition. Side by side with the Khasis live the Mikirs, Garos and Nepalis who form respectively 7.32 percent, 3.38 percent and 3.27 percent of the total rural population. Besides, there are plains people who are mainly concentrated in the town of Shillong. In the marketing centres of the border area there are a large number of Bengali Hindus who dominate the bulk of the trade in the border areas.

241 2.9 Occupation.—The greater portion of the population of the 433 district subsists on cultivation. More than 75 percent of the rural 461 households are predominantly agricultural. The industrious Khasi agriculturists males and females have a high regard for hard labour

MODEL FARM.

229

extent of waste land, some is cultivated in a manner resembling the *jum* system,—successive crops are grown on a patch of land till the soil is exhausted, and then another spot is selected, where the same process is repeated afresh, but without anything that can be called a *jumid* tenure. Any renting of land is exceptional, and there are no recognised rates of rent. The Deputy-Commissioner, however, states that an ordinary rate for rented land would be from two to three shillings a year for as much land as an individual can cultivate with his own hands.

MANURE is generally used in raising rice and potatoes. It is seldom purchased, the dung and litter of the cattle and other animals about the house being generally utilized for the purpose. For rice fields a little less than half a ton of manure, but for potatoes upwards of two tons, is required per acre. Manure, if purchased, would cost from 2s. 7½d. to 3s. 9d. per acre for rice land, and for potato fields from 12s. to 18s. per acre.

IRRIGATION for agricultural purposes is regularly practised. Water is brought to the land by means of channels cut from the numerous hill streams in the neighbourhood of the fields. Wells and tanks are unknown. The work of irrigation by means of these channels is very easily carried on, and at a very trifling outlay. Rotation of crops is not practised in the Hills.

MODEL FARM.—The Shillong Model Farm, established in 1873, has not proved a success. Experiments tried with wheat give some hope that cold-weather crops may profitably be introduced into the Hills. Two new varieties of potato—'red roughs' and 'pheasant's eye'—were successfully introduced in 1873-74; but these are not looked upon favourably by the Khásids, as they only give one crop in the year, whereas the ordinary variety yields two crops. Several fruit-trees have been planted out, including apple, pear, cherry, nectarine, and plum; and the tables of the European residents are supplied with vegetables from the garden attached to the farm. A *Manual of Potato Cultivation* compiled by the superintendent has been translated into Assamese, and copies have been distributed among the adjoining Hill tribes. The general failure in all the agricultural experiments is attributed partly to the unfitness of the soil, and still more to the ravages of white ants and other insects peculiar to the Hills. The attempts to improve the indigenous breeds of live stock have been equally unfortunate. During the two years 1874-76 the sum of Rs. 1744

230 ACCOUNT OF KHASI AND JAINTIA HILLS.

231 (£174, 8s.) was expended on the purchase of stock, including
 648 cattle, sheep, and pigs from England. Even native cattle at the
 • 654 elevation of Shillong fall off very much in the months of January
 and February from want of forage, and the Khásíás at this season
 generally drive them to lower slopes. But one of the chief objects
 in keeping cattle at the farm was to obtain manure; and *mati kaldí*
 (*Phaseolus radiatus*) was grown for them, cut green, and stocked
 [731] for food. On this they did very well. In 1875-76, however, cattle
 disease broke out on the farm in a very virulent shape. Out of 39
 cattle attacked, only 7, or 18 per cent., recovered, and the animals
 imported from England all died. There was also a heavy mortality
 in that year among the sheep and pigs. The following are the
 financial results for the two years:—1874-75—Expenditure, Rs.
 13,297. 0. 5; receipts, Rs. 309. 2. 6; deficit, Rs. 12,987. 13. 11.
 1875-76—Expenditure, Rs. 17,445. 8. 6; receipts, Rs. 1036. 15. 0;
 deficit, Rs. 10,408. 9. 6. Total deficit, Rs. 23,396. 7. 5, or £2339.

648 13s. In view of these figures the Chief Commissioner has deter-
 654 mined to restrict farming operations to small experiments in irri-
 gated *nabi* crops, and, as a measure of economy, to dispen-
 se with the services of the superintendent. The future expenditure on the
 farm will be insignificant. The establishment now (1877) consists
 of a *sardár* on Rs. 50 and a *chaukidár* on Rs. 10 a month (total,
 £72 a year), under the direct control of the Deputy-Conservator of
 Forests; the total number of live-stock is 64 head.

731 NATURAL CALAMITIES, such as blights, floods, or droughts, are
 not common in the District, although the crops in the Jáintia Hills
 sometimes suffer from insects. So far as the Deputy-Commissioner
 is able to ascertain, no destruction of crops affecting the general
 harvest has occurred within the experience of the present generation.

[435] During the Orissa famine of 1866-67 the maximum price of common
 rice reached £1 per hundredweight, but no such distress was felt as
 to require Government relief operations. The price just mentioned
 was certainly equal to the rates prevalent in the famine-stricken
 localities; but prices always run high in the Hills, and afford no just
 criterion of the state of affairs among the general body of the
 inhabitants. Distress was only felt by a small portion of the
 population, chiefly the Bengálí immigrants residing in the District,
 who are generally a well-to-do class. The Hill people, as a rule, do
 not eat potatoes, which they grow only for export; but in case of
 actual famine, they might fall back upon this crop for their own food
 262 supply.
 244
 439

CHARITABLE DISPENSARY.

255

surface soil of the hills upon which the houses are built.' Cholera is attributed to importation from the plains.

SANITATION.—It has already been stated that the ordinary Khasi villages are absolutely destitute of any conservancy arrangements. The sanitary condition, however, of the Station of Shillong is described as 'good.' The natural drainage is excellent. Drinking water is obtained chiefly from hill streams, and on the banks of these streams conservancy regulations are enforced. The water is conducted into the town by means of an artificial water-course. Public latrines have been erected at suitable places inside the town. The staff of sweepers and *beldars* keeps the roads and drains clean, and the surface generally free from pollution. The sanitary condition of the cantonment is reported to be very good.

CHARITABLE DISPENSARY.—There is one dispensary in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills—at the Station of Shillong. It was first opened in 1872, and considerable additions have since been made to the building. During 1874 a total sum of Rs. 775. 8, or £77. 11s., was expended on new constructions and repairs, towards which the European residents subscribed Rs. 329. There is now accommodation for 10 male and 3 female patients. In that year the total number of in-door patients treated was 44, of whom 9 died, giving a death-rate of 20.45 per cent. The number of out-door patients was 529, or an average daily attendance of 7.8. Of the grand total of patients of both classes, only 31 were females. The largest number of cases are classified under the headings of fevers and constipation and colic. The total income during the year was Rs. 1598. 13. 9, or £159. 17s. 8d., of which Government contributed Rs. 300 for salaries, and an additional Rs. 300 as a special allowance. The European subscriptions amounted to Rs. 869, as compared with Rs. 33 subscribed by natives. The total expenditure was Rs. 1187. 15. 6, or £118. 16s., leaving a balance in hand of Rs. 410. 14. 3. The chief items were Rs. 480 for salaries of medical subordinates, Rs. 160 for servants' wages, and Rs. 222 for dieting of sick. There were 53 minor operations performed during the year.

The people of the District have no system of medicine of their own, and no native practitioners. Their sole remedies consist in divination and incantation. The only indigenous native drugs are chireta and wormwood. As stated in a previous paragraph, a small cinchona plantation was established by Government at Nongkhal in 1867.

312
364
[164]

743

[164]

755

278
648
654.